

TUTORIAL
1.16

The curse and the promise

See Tutorial 1.6 notes for overall instructions.
The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are:
Genesis 3:9-20.

Last time

We picked up God's Narrative again, with Adam and Eve enjoying the life God had given them in the garden of Eden and their relationship with Him. Then Eve being willingly deceived by Satan disguised as a snake. The man and woman eating from *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, and the immediate disastrous results in the form of their shame and fear within God's creation, with each other, and most importantly, before God. Evil and death, in all its dimensions, had now entered and become part of who they were, just as God had warned them that it would.

God the Communicator called out to them

So we left Adam and Eve, ashamed, pathetically trying to cover their naked bodies with leaves sewed together, and now, hearing God's approach, hiding from Him in fear. Never before had this been their response, every time before they had been grateful at His approach, glad for His presence, eager to talk with Him. In His Narrative (Genesis 3:9) God recounts how He called out to Adam, asking where they were. Of course God knew where they were, knew all that had taken place...so His calling out like this had a purpose other than to seek information. In fact, God was declaring, revealing important things about Himself, as He always, tirelessly does. He is the Communicating God who speaks. It was His Voice that He had made Adam and Eve to hear. And even though now it produced fear and other responses we'll see, He knew that it was His Voice they needed to hear.

They'd been deceived, bought a lie, and it was – it always is – the Truth, God's take on things, His true Version, that they needed. Even now, having turned away from Him, joined in Satan's rebellion, even with death and the fractured relationship stamped all over them, God reaches out to them. He takes the initiative, knowing they are unable. As we'll see, God wanted them to

acknowledge that He had spoken truly. And He wanted them to understand their desperate need of Him at this, their first and darkest moment.

His questions and their answers

Each of God's questions (Genesis 3:9-13), beginning with "Where are you" are not intended for Him to find anything out but rather to reveal things to them...about Him, about themselves, about realities. And to give them opportunity, even at this late stage to humbly acknowledge their culpability. One thing that His questions reveal too is where the real authority lies. Not with the Enemy, certainly not with them, but with God Himself. He had, has, every right to demand answers and they knew it.

Adam admits their fear that they were hiding because of being ashamed at their nakedness. When God asks if they know this from having eaten of the forbidden tree, Adam gives his famous answer, whining that it was his wife's fault. She, in turn, of course, blames the serpent. Here another pattern is set in place, sadly...our human tendency to try to shift blame: to someone else, to circumstances, to their upbringing, the "bad crowd they fell in with". And modern psychology plays along with this, encouraging a culture in which those who claim the victim label are no longer responsible for their thoughts, words or actions.

No one, of course, was fooling God. No one was going to crawl out from under their responsibilities. Everyone was, and always is, held responsible for their choices and actions.

With Him all attempts to manipulate, to deflect, or to spin things are futile.

The curse and the promise

Because the Narrative doesn't tell us, we've no way of understanding all the implications of the curse God now puts on the snake for being Satan's chosen disguise in his deception of Eve. (3:14) It's tempting to speculate, but all we can safely say is that it was reduced from that moment to the legless slithering we're familiar with today.

God will go on to pronounce other terrible results of the rebellion of His image-bearers and, until now, Creation caretakers. But first, in this, the darkest of times, when hope would otherwise have been extinguished in their hearts, God allows a small but bright pin-point of light to shine. A hope. A life-line to be grasped even as they're realising that they've rejected everything that was real and solid in their lives - hope in the middle of the cold terror that must have been gripping their hearts.

A promise, not clear in detail, but real and solid nonetheless. In the form of a revelation to the snake, really to Satan, he's told that his apparent recent victory will be fleeting. A man, an offspring of the woman, will come, who'll do

battle with this one who has sworn enmity with God and His created beings. Satan will inflict pain, but His will be the ultimate victory. Satan's temporary reign will be brought to an end with his defeat. God is letting the man and woman know that although their story from now on will be full of pain and sorrow, His Story is still being written. No one but He, the Lord God has the right to decide how it will end. This is who He is. Unwilling, unable, in His holy being, to relate to anyone on their terms. To tolerate offence to His perfection. But at the same time, always reaching out, reaching down, in love.

This kind of reaching down for no reason other than His loving choice can never be effectively labeled in human language. In English, the best we have is the word grace - a word that has lost its coinage in common usage. Something to be constantly grateful for though is that we, unlike many other language communities, have His Story available in our language. We have the wonderful opportunity to hear His Story of how He reaches out *in grace* to rescue humans from their predicament. So we're not restricted to theoretical propositions, to dogma, dry doctrinal statements. He wants our understanding of who He is - in this and every aspect - to grow within us as we listen and observe Him, in action, in real circumstances, contexts and relationships.

This part of the narrative (Genesis 3:17-19) concludes with God giving them some insights into the results of their disobedience. Of the pain in childbirth Eve would experience. The earth from which Adam had been formed, and over which he'd been given responsibility, was itself cursed. Changed. It was now a harsher environment. A tougher place to live. Life would be difficult and painful. Their needs would only be met with great challenge, hard, physical work.

And because they are the ancestors, the antecedents, of all the human race (Genesis 3:20), the dire results – the great curse – would come on all. Having chosen to try to write his own story, in many ways it would not be a pleasant one for man. Thankfully God did not walk away. He will still have the final say in how things unfold for His lost image-bearing race.



DISCUSSION POINTS

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1. Consider Adam and Eve's initial response to God after their disobedience in light of the way many people in our society blame their problems on something or someone else. From

what we've seen of God so far in the Genesis narrative, what do you believe is His perspective on people's tendency to paint themselves as victims rather than taking responsibility for their own choices?

2. Think about your own responses when your faults and wrong actions are exposed. How have you typically handled that kind of situation in your life? What insights does this perhaps give you about the way you view (1) God (2) yourself?
3. Keeping in mind that Adam and Eve had just, as it were, thrown back in God's face all that He had done and all He intended for them, what do you think about Him now making a promise to send a Deliverer? In human terms would that kind of response by a sovereign ruler be seen as a sign of strength or weakness?



ACTIVITIES

The curse and the promise

1. In no more than a page;
 - a) list some of the evidences of God's grace that He has already demonstrated up to this point of the Narrative.
 - b) explain how you think grace might differ from generosity or even love.
 - c) describe some ways you're aware of that God has shown His grace to you, personally.